

Breathtails: a Song Cycle in 13 Breaths Written for Anne LeBaron

Charles Bernstein

... 1 ...

My breath
had already settled
on the windows
of eternity
I go on but
only in flits
and stops
to hear myself
unsettling
as I
settled in
as I go on
pressed against
the windowpane
when even
as I stop
the pane presses
against me.

... 2 ...

The world passed
or I passed it
as I live and breathe
no one saw it
coming
no one coming saw it
as I breathed I lived
the world passes by
or I passed it by
the world I passed by
passed by me

... 3 ...

Breath is the door
from life to death
on the border of
hearing I hear not hearing
on the border of
death and life
hear not hearing

... 4 ...

In breathless anticipation
I catch my breath
then fall under
the spell of
respiratory arrest
trial by
rhythmic disturbance
I lose my breath
in anticipation of
spell of
arrest, trial by
disturbance
catch my breathless
anticipation
under
arrest

... 5 ...

I am breathing in long
(he trains himself)
or breathing out long
(she discerns)
or breathing in short
(she trains herself)
or breathing out short
(he discerns)
I will breathe inconstantly
(he demurs)
mindless of time and space
(she protests)
I will breathe in without hope
(mindlessly)
I will breathe out in despair
(mindfully)
I will breathe out in despair
(mindfully)

I will breathe in without hope
(mindlessly)
mindless of time and space
(she protests)
I will breathe inconstantly
(he demurs)
or breathing out short
(he discerns)
or breathing in short
(she trains herself)
or breathing out long
(she discerns)
I am breathing in long
(he trains himself)

...6...

strident, berserk, & artless
putting aside need & care
(with reference to the work)
artless, berserk, and strident
neither here nor there
(with reference to the work)
ardent, alert, and mindful
putting aside grief and tare
(with reference to the work)

...7...

breath
settled
on
eternity
but
only
stops
only
to
unsettling
as
as
in
pressed
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... 8 ...

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... 10 ...

shivering in August
shouting at the rain
sleepy at noon
pummeled, frayed

no fences to guide me
neither to the nays
sense don't hide me
flushed in haze

hopes at half mast
fear rumples waves
catch a glimpse of heather
cut it out before it blows away

... 11 ...

1 is the ameliorative co-opt
2 is get even fast
3 is the liberal's nostalgia
4 is sufficient unto the day but on sale every night
5 or more has 20 percent service added automatically
6 is the smallest perfect number
7 is the loneliest number & cries itself to sleep each night
8 fibs even when sincerity is easier
9's the end of the line
10's too cool to be cool
11 runs like rivers under the night
12 is all over before it started
13 is beloved of all incongruous saints
14 is for flat tax
15 likes compote with apricots
16 is sweetly silent on 17
17 won't say
18's twice the sum of its digits.
19 is still too young to die
20 is Uncle Max's favorite
21 is the smallest distance from here to there

...12...

shivering August
shouting frayed
fences hide
flushed haze
hopes masked
fear's waves
glimpse heather
blows away
masked fences
frayed glimpse
August hopes
hide haze
flushed fear
masked waves
heather fences
shivering fray
fear's way
shivering rays
slows flush
low August
asked lush

...13...

Everything we are
the air, the
sky that falls
into our mouths
the passing of
day into sobs
of night belies
the fact in

the name of
substance, motion, rhythmic
erasure, as if
the food we
eat replaces the
fools we are
the air, the
everything we take
as fake, as

real, gains substance
in its absence
the air the
relocates rhythmic erasure
into mouths passing
falls, fooled as
we are by
the care we
are, or will

become, in the
name of sky
that falls as
if name of
night sobs in
its absence, the
fool believes, or
will become, the
name of, sobs.

